

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 CANBER 07276 080902Z  
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W  
-----011337 080908Z /12  
P 080716Z SEP 78  
FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4254

S E C R E T CANBERRA 7276

STADIS//////////

EXDIS

NOFORN

FOR EA AND PM ONLY

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2  
TAGS: MILI, MARR, AS  
SUBJECT: UNEXPLAINED "ALERT" AT JDSCS-NARRUNGAR

1. SUMMARY: BELIEVE YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT WE JUST CAME THROUGH A VERY "CLOSE CALL" ON AN EXTREMELY SENSITIVE MATTER WHICH COULD HAVE ERUPTED INTO A MAJOR AND POTENTIALLY VERY DAMAGING "CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE" BETWEEN THE US AND GOA INVOLVING A JCS-IMPOSED "ALERT" AT THE TJoint DEFENSE SPACE COMMUNICATIONS STATION (JDSCS) AT NARRUNGAR (WOOMERA). END SUMMARY.

2. SOMETIME LATE YESTERDAY AFTERNOON, THE JCS ORDERED A "SAFE WIND" ALERT STATUS AT JDSCS. WHEN THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE REPRESENTATIVE (ADR) AT THE STATION ASKED HIS AMERICAN COUNTERPART WHY THE FACILITY WAS ON ALERT, HE WAS ALLEGEDLY TOLD "THE ALERT WAS CALLED FOR US NATIONAL REASONS AND THE REASON FOR CALLING THE ALERT IS NOT RELEASABLE EXCEPT TO US PERSONNEL." SEVERAL HOURS LATER,

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THE "ALERT" WAS CANCELLED AS MYSTERIOUSLY AS IT WAS IMPOSED.

3. A "SAFE WIND" ALERT IS A NOTIFICATION TO SECURITY FORCES TO BE MORE WATCHFUL, AND IS NOT, BY ITSELF, THE SAME SORT OF ALERT WHICH CAUSED THE 1973 DEBACLE AT NORTH WEST CAPE, I.E. A FULL "DEFENSE POSTURE"

ALERT. PROBLEM IS, SINCE US PERSONNEL AT JOINT FACILITIES IN AUSTRALIA ARE UNARMED AND HAVE NOT AUTONOMOUS SECURITY CAPABILITY, THIS ALERT IN FACT MEANT TURNING TO THE SENIOR AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE REPRESENTATIVE FOR INSTRUCTIONS TO AUSTRALIAN STATION SECURITY PERSONNEL. HOWEVER, THE JDSCS STATION COMMANDER WAS FORBIDDEN TO TELL THE ADR THE REASON FOR THE ALERT-- A MATTER THAT REQUIRED NO TIME FLAT TO REACH THE ACTING CHIEF DEFENSE SCIENTIST (W. CAPELHORN) IN CANBERRA, WHO WAS ONTO THE EMBASSY INSTANTLY. CINCPACREP MANAGED TO GET THINGS BACK UNDER A SEMBLANCE OF CONTROL WHILE HE CHECKED THE MATTER OUT WITH JCS. AS IT TURNS OUT, THE ALERT WAS CALLED BECAUSE AN ANTI-CASTRO CUBAN TERRORIST GROUP THREATENED TO ATTACK AN AIRPORT IN THE US, AND ALL US AIR DEFENSE COMMAND INSTALLATIONS (INCLUDING JDSCS, WHICH OPERATES UNDER USAF AUSPICES) WERE THEREFORE PLACED IN A HEIGHTENED STATE OF READINESS.

4. THE MATTER HAS NOW BEEN EXPLAINED, AND WE BELIEVE ADOD IS MOLLIFIED. HAD THIS NOT OCCURRED IN THE MIDDLE OF NIGHT WHEN MINISTER WERE OUT OF TOWN AND WE HAD TIME TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT, IT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY HAVE BROKEN OUT INTO PUBLIC-- AND AT LEAST AT THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL.

5. THE OINT IS NOT THAT IT WAS A MISTAKE (AND IT APPARENTLY WAS), BUT RATHER THAT THE PROCEDURES FOR  
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KEEPING THE STATE DEPT INFORMED (AND THUS, COLLATERALLY, ALLIED GOVERNMENTS TO WHOM WE TURN FOR PHYSICAL SECURITY FOR AS WELL AS FOR CONTINUED ACCESS TO "JOINT" DEFENSE FACILITIES) DIDN'T RPT DIDN'T WORK. IT MAY BE THAT THIS IS JUST A MATTER OF ELIMINATING CERTAIN ADDRESSEES OVERSEAS FROM THE COLLECTIVE ADDRESS ON CERTAIN TYPES OF DEFENSE ALERTS. BUT THE PLAIN FACT IS THAT A JCS ALERT WENT TO A FACILITY IN AUSTRALIA AND NEITHER THE STATE DEPT, NOR THE EMBASSY, NOR THE GOA WERE TOLD OF IT, OR WHY. WE BELIEVE THAT CAPELHORN'S REACTION (CAPELHORN BEING ONE OF THE FRIENDLIEST TO THE US AND MOST ACCESSIBLE OF THE SENIORMOST PERMANENT HIERARCHY IN ADOD) --WHICH COULD PRACTICALLY BE MEASURED IN MICROSECONDS--ILLUSTRATES THE VERY REAL SKITTISHNESS ON THE PART OF THE GOA TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A REPEAT PERFORMANCE OF NORTH WEST CAPE 1973.

6. DEPT MAY WISH TO DISCUSS WITH JCS OR ISA--IN LOW KEY AND WITHOUT RANCOR, BUT AT FAIRLY HIGH LEVEL--THIS MOST RECENT INCIDENT, STRESSING THE ANXIETY OF THE HIGHEST LEVELS IN THE GOA THAT WE NOT GO THROUGH 1973 AGAIN. AS AN ABSOLUTE MINIMUM, FOR THE US STATION COMMANDER TO TELL

THE SENIOR AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE REPRESENTATIVE "I HAVE JUST BEEN INSTRUCTED TO PUT THIS FACILITY ON ALERT AND CAN YOU PLEASE TELL THE AUSTRALIAN SECURITY FORCE TO STEP UP THEIR AWARENESS, BUT I CAN'T TELL YOU WHY BECAUSE THAT INFORMATION IS ONLY RELEASABLE TO AMERICAN NATIONALS" IS RATHER QUESTIONABLE JUDGMENT (IF NOT OUTRIGHT POOR TASTE). IT MAY BE THAT IF US COMMANDERS AT THE JOINT FACILITIES ARE RELUCTANT TO QUESTION ORDERS BY THEIR SUPERIORS, WE MAY NEED TO ORDER THEM (IN TERMS OF THE US AMBASSADOR'S AUTHORITY) TO AT LEAST TELL THE EMBASSY WHEN THEY RECEIVE AN ALERT MESSAGE SO WE CAN TAKE STEPS TO SORT THINGS OUT.

7. ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, THIS HAS BEEN A CLOSE CALL, AND MERITS SOME THOUGHT BY ALL. TO SAY SIMPLY "IT WAS ALL A SECRET

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DREADFUL MISTAKE" IS NOT PRECISELY REASSURING.  
ALSTON

SECRET

NNN

## Message Attributes

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**Decaption Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
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**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
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